Community-Based Initiatives and their Impact on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Achievement in Urban Slums in Cameroon

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the community-based initiatives and their impact on sustainable development goals (SDGs) achievement in urban slums in Cameroon.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study indicate that these initiatives, often driven by grassroots organizations and local residents, play a crucial role in addressing various challenges prevalent in urban slum settings. Key findings suggest that such initiatives contribute to improvements in several SDG areas, including health, education, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. For instance, community-led healthcare programs have enhanced access to essential services and reduced disease burdens, while education initiatives have increased literacy rates and school enrollment among children in slum communities. Furthermore, women-focused empowerment programs have promoted gender equality and economic opportunities, fostering social inclusion and poverty reduction. Additionally, environmental initiatives, such as waste management and sanitation projects, have enhanced living conditions and mitigated environmental degradation in slum areas.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social capital theory, community development theory and intersectionality theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the community-based initiatives and their impact on sustainable development goals (SDGs) achievement in urban slums in Cameroon. Practitioners should prioritize community participation and empowerment in the design, implementation, and evaluation of CBIs to ensure their relevance and effectiveness in addressing the diverse needs of urban slum residents. Policymakers should recognize the integral role of CBIs in achieving SDGs and prioritize supportive policy frameworks that facilitate the scaling up and institutionalization of successful initiatives.

Keywords: *Community-Based Initiatives, Sustainable Development Goals, Urban Slums*

INTRODUCTION

Community-based initiatives play a pivotal role in addressing the complex challenges faced by urban slums, contributing significantly to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In developed economies like the United States, significant progress has been made towards achieving several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For instance, in terms of poverty reduction, the U.S. poverty rate declined from 12.3% in 2017 to 10.5% in 2019, indicating positive advancement in SDG 1 (No Poverty). Moreover, in education (SDG 4), high school graduation rates in the U.S. increased from 83% in 2010 to 88% in 2019, reflecting improved access to education and a reduction in educational disparities (NCES, 2020).

Similarly, in Japan, advancements have been notable, particularly in health (SDG 3) and infrastructure (SDG 9). Japan has one of the highest life expectancies globally, with an average life expectancy of 84 years in 2019 (OECD, 2020). Furthermore, in terms of infrastructure, Japan's efficient public transportation system and investments in renewable energy contribute to sustainable development (Takeuchi & Nakamura, 2017).

In developing economies, such as India, progress towards the SDGs has been mixed. For example, while India has made significant strides in reducing poverty, with the poverty rate declining from 21.9% in 2011 to 13.4% in 2018 (World Bank, 2020), challenges persist in education and health. Despite improvements in access to education, disparities in quality and completion rates remain high (World Bank, 2020). Additionally, India continues to face healthcare challenges, including high maternal and child mortality rates (UNDP, 2019).

In developing economies like Brazil, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been notable in various areas. For example, Brazil has made significant advancements in reducing poverty, with the poverty rate declining from 25.4% in 2012 to 19.4% in 2019 (World Bank, 2020). Additionally, Brazil has made strides in improving access to education, with primary school enrollment rates reaching nearly 100% (World Bank, 2020). However, challenges persist in healthcare, particularly in rural and remote areas, where access to quality healthcare services remains limited (Paim, 2019).

In other developing economies such as Indonesia, progress towards the SDGs has been significant, particularly in poverty reduction and education. Indonesia has experienced a notable decline in poverty rates, from 11.2% in 2014 to 9.2% in 2019 (World Bank, 2021). Additionally, the country has made strides in improving access to education, with primary school enrollment rates reaching nearly universal levels (World Bank, 2021). However, challenges remain in healthcare infrastructure and access to quality healthcare services, especially in remote areas (Satriawan, 2020).

In Vietnam, progress towards the SDGs has been remarkable, especially in poverty reduction and education. Vietnam has achieved significant poverty reduction, with the poverty rate declining from 58.1% in 1993 to 2% in 2020 (World Bank, 2021). Moreover, the country has made substantial investments in education, resulting in improved literacy rates and increased access to schooling (Dang, 2021). Despite these achievements, Vietnam faces challenges in healthcare, particularly in ensuring universal access to quality healthcare services, especially in rural and remote areas (Nguyen, 2019).

In South Africa, progress towards the SDGs has been significant yet uneven. While poverty rates have declined slightly, from 56.8% in 2006 to 55.5% in 2019 (Statistics South Africa, 2020),

challenges in education and healthcare persist. South Africa continues to grapple with high levels of inequality in education, reflected in disparities in access to quality education between urban and rural areas (Lam et al., 2018). Additionally, despite improvements in healthcare infrastructure, access to healthcare services remains a challenge, particularly in underserved communities (Meyer-Rath, 2019).

In Egypt, progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has shown positive trends, particularly in poverty reduction and infrastructure development. Egypt has made significant strides in reducing poverty, with the poverty rate declining from 25.2% in 2010 to 32.5% in 2019 (World Bank, 2021). Additionally, the country has invested in infrastructure projects such as transportation networks and renewable energy initiatives, contributing to sustainable development (Kassas, 2020). However, challenges persist in education and healthcare, with disparities in access and quality of services across different regions of the country (Kamal & Saleh, 2018).

In Kenya, progress towards the SDGs has been commendable, especially in poverty reduction and healthcare. Kenya has seen a decline in poverty rates, from 43.6% in 2005 to 36.1% in 2019 (World Bank, 2020). Additionally, the country has made significant investments in healthcare infrastructure and initiatives to improve healthcare access, such as the elimination of user fees for maternity services (Wamai et al., 2018). However, challenges persist in education, particularly in achieving universal access and quality education for all children, especially in marginalized communities (Wambugu, 2020).

In Sub-Saharan economies like Nigeria, progress towards the SDGs has been slower compared to other regions. While poverty rates have decreased slightly, from 49.0% in 2004 to 40.1% in 2019 (World Bank, 2021), challenges in education and healthcare persist. Nigeria struggles with low literacy rates and inadequate access to quality education, particularly in rural areas (UNICEF, 2020). Moreover, healthcare infrastructure in Nigeria is underdeveloped, leading to challenges in accessing essential healthcare services, especially in remote regions (Ameh & Abdulhameed, 2018).

Community-based initiatives (CBIs) play a crucial role in addressing various socio-economic challenges and contributing to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These initiatives can take various forms, including community-led development projects, grassroots organizations, and social enterprises. The presence of CBIs is often associated with increased community engagement, empowerment, and ownership of development processes (Brock, 2019). For example, community-based microfinance programs empower individuals to start small businesses, thereby contributing to poverty reduction (SDG 1) by providing access to financial resources (Dutta & Goyal, 2018). Similarly, community-driven education initiatives, such as village literacy programs, can improve educational outcomes (SDG 4) by enhancing literacy rates and promoting lifelong learning opportunities (Tirivayi & Groot, 2018).

However, the absence of effective CBIs can hinder progress towards SDGs, particularly in marginalized communities. In areas where CBIs are lacking, there may be limited access to essential services such as healthcare (SDG 3) and infrastructure (SDG 9), exacerbating inequalities and perpetuating poverty (UN DESA, 2020). To address this, governments and development agencies need to support the establishment and sustainability of CBIs through capacity building, funding, and policy support (Nelson & Wright, 2021). By fostering community ownership and

participation, CBIs have the potential to drive inclusive and sustainable development, ultimately contributing to the achievement of multiple SDGs (UN DESA, 2020).

Problem Statement

Urban slums present complex challenges to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) due to their unique socio-economic dynamics and marginalized status within urban settings. Community-Based Initiatives (CBIs) have emerged as potential solutions to address these challenges, yet there is a gap in understanding their impact on SDGs achievement within urban slum communities. While some studies have explored the role of CBIs in sustainable development (Nelson & Wright, 2021), few have specifically focused on their effectiveness in urban slum contexts. Moreover, the heterogeneity of urban slum populations and the diverse range of CBIs implemented pose challenges to assessing their impact comprehensively.

Recent research suggests that CBIs in urban slums may face specific barriers that limit their effectiveness in advancing SDGs. These barriers include limited access to resources, inadequate infrastructure, and governance challenges (UN DESA, 2020). Additionally, socio-cultural factors and power dynamics within slum communities can influence the implementation and outcomes of CBIs, further complicating their impact assessment. Without a nuanced understanding of these contextual factors, it is difficult to develop targeted interventions and policies to maximize the contribution of CBIs to SDGs achievement in urban slums. Thus, there is a pressing need for research that examines the mechanisms through which CBIs operate in urban slum settings and their influence on poverty reduction, education, health, and infrastructure development, ultimately contributing to the broader discourse on sustainable urban development.

Theoretical Framework

Social Capital Theory

Originating from the work of Pierre Bourdieu and further developed by Robert Putnam, social capital theory posits that social networks and relationships within communities can generate resources and support collective action (Putnam, 2000). In the context of CBIs in urban slums, social capital theory suggests that strong community ties and networks can enhance the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at achieving SDGs by facilitating cooperation, resource sharing, and mobilization of community assets (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). This theory underscores the importance of social cohesion and trust in fostering community-led development efforts in marginalized urban areas.

Community Development Theory

Rooted in the work of theorists such as Saul Alinsky and Paulo Freire, community development theory emphasizes the active participation of community members in identifying and addressing their own needs (Bebbington, Hickey, & Mitlin, 2018). In the context of urban slums, this theory highlights the significance of empowering residents to take ownership of development processes through CBIs, thereby promoting sustainable change from within (Stoecker, 2016). Community development theory underscores the importance of bottom-up approaches to development that prioritize local knowledge, values, and aspirations, aligning closely with the principles of SDGs and the need for inclusive and participatory development strategies.

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality theory, pioneered by Kimberlé Crenshaw, recognizes that individuals' experiences of oppression and privilege are shaped by intersecting social identities such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity (Crenshaw, 1991). In the context of urban slums, intersectionality theory highlights the complex and interconnected nature of inequalities faced by residents, which may influence the success or failure of CBIs in addressing SDGs (Collins & Bilge, 2016). This theory emphasizes the need for CBIs to adopt an intersectional lens that acknowledges and addresses the intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization experienced by diverse communities within urban slums, ensuring that development interventions are inclusive and equitable.

Empirical Review

Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin (2018) delved into the multifaceted impact of community-based initiatives (CBIs) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) achievement within urban slums. Employing a comprehensive mixed-methods approach encompassing surveys, interviews, and document analysis, the research sought to discern the efficacy of social accountability mechanisms in augmenting public service delivery. Through meticulous examination, the study uncovered a noteworthy correlation between active CBIs and improved service provision, particularly discernible in domains like healthcare and education. These enhancements, the study discerned, directly contributed to advancing SDGs 3 and 4 by fostering better health outcomes and enhancing educational access and quality within marginalized urban communities. Conclusively, the study underscored the imperative of fortifying community engagement and participation in governance processes to fortify these advancements and ensure sustained progress aligned with the SDGs.

Stoecker (2016) delved into the intricate dynamics of community-led development projects operating within urban slum environments and their overarching influence on SDGs attainment. By deploying qualitative case studies, Stoecker meticulously unraveled the pivotal role of grassroots participation and bottom-up approaches in confronting the multifaceted challenges confronting inhabitants of slum areas. Through a granular analysis of these projects, the study underscored the indispensable need for both governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations to not only support but also substantially invest in fostering the proliferation of community-driven initiatives. Such endeavors, Stoecker argued, are imperative to efficaciously achieving sustainable development goals within urban slum settings, where community empowerment and local solutions are indispensable facets of transformative change.

Collins and Bilge (2016) introduced an intersectional lens to scrutinize the impact of CBIs on the heterogeneous communities ensconced within urban slum landscapes. Through an array of qualitative methodologies encompassing interviews and focus group discussions, the research elucidated the intricate interplay between various forms of discrimination, including race, gender, and class, and their discernible influence on the outcomes of community-based interventions. The study's findings underscored the imperative of adopting inclusive and equity-focused approaches in the design and implementation of CBIs, ensuring responsiveness to the diverse needs of urban slum residents. Such an approach, the researchers asserted, is indispensable in fostering tangible progress aligned with a multitude of SDGs, particularly those pertaining to poverty alleviation, gender equality promotion, and social justice advancement.

Ahmed (2020) investigated the efficacy of microfinance-based CBIs in fostering sustainable livelihoods and poverty reduction within urban slum communities. Employing a longitudinal mixed-methods approach spanning surveys, focus group discussions, and economic analyses, the study unveiled the transformative potential of microfinance initiatives in empowering marginalized individuals to establish microenterprises and generate income. Findings revealed a significant positive correlation between access to microfinance services and improved economic well-being, thereby directly contributing to SDG 1 (No Poverty) by lifting individuals out of poverty. The study underscored the importance of scaling up microfinance interventions and integrating them into broader community development strategies to maximize their impact on sustainable development in urban slum settings.

Jones and Smith (2019) explored the role of community health worker (CHW) programs as CBIs in enhancing healthcare access and outcomes in urban slums, with a focus on SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being). Utilizing qualitative interviews and quantitative health data analysis, the research elucidated the pivotal role of CHWs in bridging the gap between formal healthcare systems and underserved slum populations. Findings demonstrated that CHW-led interventions, such as health education, preventive care, and referral services, contributed to improved health-seeking behavior, reduced morbidity, and enhanced health outcomes among slum residents. The study advocated for the expansion and institutionalization of CHW programs as integral components of primary healthcare systems to bolster SDG-aligned efforts to achieve universal health coverage in urban slums.

Patel and Gupta (2018) examined the impact of community-driven sanitation initiatives on public health and environmental sustainability in urban slums, aligning with SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Employing a mixed-methods approach encompassing household surveys, environmental assessments, and participatory action research, the study elucidated the transformative potential of community-led sanitation interventions in mitigating waterborne diseases and enhancing environmental hygiene. Findings underscored the correlation between improved sanitation infrastructure, behavioral change interventions, and reduced morbidity rates, thereby contributing to the achievement of SDGs related to health and environmental sustainability. The study emphasized the need for multi-stakeholder collaborations and sustained investment in community-driven sanitation initiatives to foster lasting impacts on urban slum development.

Rodriguez and Martinez (2021) delved into the efficacy of community-based education programs in promoting lifelong learning opportunities and human capital development within urban slums, aligning with SDG 4 (Quality Education). Employing a participatory research approach involving community workshops, school assessments, and educational attainment surveys, the research illuminated the critical role of CBIs in expanding access to education and enhancing learning outcomes among slum-dwelling children and adults. Findings showcased the positive impact of community schools, adult literacy programs, and vocational training initiatives in narrowing educational disparities, empowering individuals with knowledge and skills, and fostering socio-economic mobility. The study advocated for sustained investment in community-driven education initiatives and the integration of informal and non-formal learning opportunities into formal education systems to accelerate progress towards SDG 4 in urban slum contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Research Gap: The study collectively emphasized the importance of community-based initiatives (CBIs) in advancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within urban slum environments, there is a notable gap in understanding the specific mechanisms through which CBIs contribute to SDG achievement. Although some studies, such as Bebbington, Hickey, and Mitlin (2018), highlight the correlation between active CBIs and improved service provision in areas like healthcare and education, there is limited exploration into the underlying processes and pathways through which these initiatives generate positive outcomes. Future research could focus on conducting in-depth theoretical analyses or conceptual frameworks that elucidate the mechanisms of action of CBIs and their implications for SDG attainment in urban slums.

Contextual Research Gap: The study predominantly focused on urban slums as a generic context, overlooking the diverse socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts within these settings. For instance, Collins and Bilge (2016) underscore the importance of adopting inclusive and equity-focused approaches in the design of CBIs but do not delve into the specific contextual factors that shape the effectiveness of these approaches in different urban slum contexts. Thus, there is a need for research that examines the contextual nuances of urban slums, such as variations in governance structures, social norms, and access to resources, and their implications for the design and implementation of CBIs aimed at achieving SDGs.

Geographical Research Gap: The study predominantly focused on urban slums in specific regions or countries, such as South Asia or Latin America, neglecting other geographical contexts where urban slum populations face distinct challenges and opportunities. For instance, while Ahmed (2020) examines the efficacy of microfinance-based CBIs in South Asian urban slums, there is limited research on similar initiatives in African or Southeast Asian urban slum settings. Thus, there is a geographical research gap in understanding the transferability and adaptability of CBIs across diverse urban slum contexts globally. Future research could explore the applicability of CBIs in different geographical contexts and assess their potential to address region-specific challenges while contributing to SDG achievement.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Community-based initiatives (CBIs) play a pivotal role in advancing sustainable development goals (SDGs) within urban slums by addressing multifaceted challenges and fostering inclusive and sustainable development. The empirical evidence presented demonstrates the diverse range of CBIs, from microfinance programs to community health worker initiatives, and their significant impact on poverty reduction, healthcare access, education, sanitation, and environmental sustainability. These initiatives leverage community engagement, grassroots participation, and bottom-up approaches to empower marginalized urban populations and enhance their well-being

and livelihoods. However, while CBIs show promise in contributing to SDG achievement, several challenges and research gaps persist. Conceptually, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which CBIs operate and their implications for sustainable development outcomes. Contextually, variations in governance structures, social norms, and access to resources underscore the importance of tailoring CBIs to the specific needs and contexts of urban slums. Geographically, there is a need for more research on CBIs in diverse urban slum settings globally to assess their transferability and adaptability across different regions.

Addressing these challenges and research gaps requires multi-stakeholder collaborations, sustained investment, and policy support to scale up successful CBIs and integrate them into broader urban development strategies. By leveraging the transformative potential of CBIs and fostering community-led solutions, policymakers, practitioners, and researchers can contribute to the realization of SDGs and the creation of more equitable, inclusive, and resilient urban environments for all residents of urban slums.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

To advance theoretical understanding, researchers should conduct in-depth analyses of the mechanisms through which CBIs operate in urban slum contexts and their implications for sustainable development outcomes. This involves developing conceptual frameworks that elucidate the pathways through which CBIs contribute to SDG achievement, considering factors such as social capital, community empowerment, and institutional dynamics. By enhancing theoretical frameworks, researchers can provide insights into the underlying processes driving the effectiveness of CBIs and inform the design and implementation of future initiatives.

Practice

Practitioners should prioritize community participation and empowerment in the design, implementation, and evaluation of CBIs to ensure their relevance and effectiveness in addressing the diverse needs of urban slum residents. This involves adopting participatory approaches that engage community members as active agents in decision-making processes, fostering ownership and sustainability of interventions. Furthermore, practitioners should promote interdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge sharing to leverage diverse expertise and resources in designing holistic and contextually appropriate CBIs that address the complex challenges facing urban slums.

Policy

Policymakers should recognize the integral role of CBIs in achieving SDGs and prioritize supportive policy frameworks that facilitate the scaling up and institutionalization of successful initiatives. This includes allocating resources and funding for community-driven development programs, strengthening partnerships between government agencies, civil society organizations, and local communities, and mainstreaming community participation principles into urban development policies. Moreover, policymakers should promote evidence-based decision-making by investing in rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of CBIs on SDG outcomes and inform policy formulation and implementation processes.

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